



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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NEWS RELEASE

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Preliminary Approval for New Diploma Systems Awarded to 30 Schools, Districts

Education Commissioner Peter McWalters has granted preliminary approval to the new Diploma Systems in 30 schools and school districts, indicating that they have made sufficient progress in implementing the Board of Regents' High School Regulations of 2003.

The Commissioner has withheld approval from 8 districts and one high school. Although those with approval withheld have shown progress in developing some of the components of the Diploma System, they must submit further evidence to the Commissioner to demonstrate that they are on track toward full implementation of the regulations by 2010.

Each district, state-operated school, and charter high school has received a letter from the Commissioner specifying what needs to be accomplished in order to receive full approval of their Diploma System.

"Good work has been done across the state to implement the new graduation requirements, which are aligned with college and work-readiness standards," said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. "As we move forward, the Regents plan to bring the same instructional-support systems to our middle schools in order to build a strong foundation for high-school success."

"Every place we have visited, even those that have not yet received preliminary approval, has taken high-school redesign seriously," said Commissioner McWalters. "All districts are working to engage parents and students, to make sure that each student is known well by someone in the school, and to ensure that all graduates are well prepared for college or the world of work."

The Regents' Regulations of 2003 require all districts to redesign their high schools to provide more literacy support to students reading below grade level, create more personalized learning environments for all students, and implement proficiency-based graduation requirements, beginning with the Class of 2008. Under these new graduation requirements, students must be able to demonstrate what they know and are able to do, through such means as senior projects, exhibitions, portfolios of work, and end-of-course exams.

Over the past two years, staff members of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have brought together teams of educators to review the implementation of the new Diploma System in each district. Districts were evaluated on five criteria: development of the proficiency-based graduation requirements, support to students, support to staff, communication, and development of policy/use of data.

After three rounds of review and a series of face-to-face meetings with district and school staff members, Commissioner McWalters determined the status of each district and issued approval letters.

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Those districts that had preliminary approval withheld may submit additional evidence for review at any time as they seek approval of their Diploma Systems.

All districts must submit additional material in order to receive full approval. Under proposed regulations scheduled for public hearing in March, the Board of Regents will endorse “Regents’ Diplomas” beginning in 2010. Only districts with approved systems will be able to issue Regents’ Diplomas. By 2012, districts without full approval will no longer be authorized to grant diplomas.

The districts and school that had preliminary approval withheld are: Burrillville, Cranston, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich, North Smithfield, Providence, Rhode Island School for the Deaf, Tiverton, and Woonsocket

All other districts, charter high schools, and state-operated schools received preliminary approval.

For a copy of any of the approval letters sent to districts, please e-mail ruth.furia@ride.ri.gov

Note: Public hearings on the proposed revised Secondary School Regulations are scheduled for March 4th, at 5 p.m., at Toll Gate High School, Warwick, and March 6th, at 5 p.m., at the Shepard Building, 80 Washington St., Providence. The proposed regulations are posted on the RIDE Web site, www.ride.ri.gov, under Board of Regents/Regents Regulations.